

### What causes autism?

- NOBODY KNOWS!!!!!!
- It's NOT:
  - Poor parenting
- Possibilities:
  - Problems in the social environment
  - Problems in the physical environment
  - Brain dysfunction
- Current best guess?
  - Genetics

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### Current Issue: Why is autism on the rise?

- Broader definition
- Better diagnostics
- ?
- *Lack of understanding of the cause of autism creates additional stress for many families of children with autism.*
  - Effects understanding and search for cause
  - Effects early intervention decisions

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### Is there a cure?

- Although some children do very well with early, intensive, systematic behavioral treatment, there is no known cure; however there is "best outcome"
- Mixed results with medications
- Mixed results with behavioral/educational results
- Many "alternative" therapies
  - From diets to dolphins

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### Specifically

- Approximately 50-75% of the population has mental retardation
- Approximately 40-50% of the population in non-verbal
- Approximately 25%-30% have some words and lose them
- Approximately 2% of the population has "savant" skills

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### Diagnosis

- Behavioral diagnosis, average age is 5 years
- 33% of parents recognize signs before age one, 80% before 2
- Recent advances suggest that very young children can be diagnosed
  - Clinically children about the age of two, as young as 18 month
  - Retrospective research, at age one
  - Some infants at high-risk, at 9 mos.?

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### Risk Factors

- Having a sibling or relative with ASD (1 in 20)
- Having an identical twin with ASD (60% -90%); fraternal twin (0-24%)
- Being a boy (1 in 4)
- Having fragile x syndrome (30%)
- New ideas
  - Parental psychiatric history
  - Advanced paternal age
  - # of fertility treatments mother had

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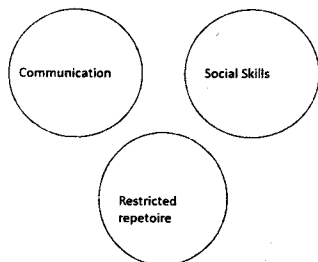
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### Core Deficits




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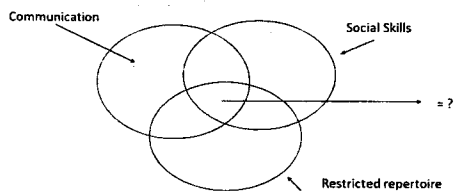
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### Core Deficits




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### Characteristics of the population

- Estimated 1 in 110 live births
  - Big increase in recent years
  - Rate consistent in North America, Europe and Asia
  - More common than Aids, diabetes and cancer combined
- 4 times as likely in boys as in girls
- All races, all classes
- "Invisible" disability
- Can co-occur with other disabilities (ADHD, Down syndrome, Fragile X, tuberous sclerosis, epilepsy, etc)

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## Introduction to Autism

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1/24/11

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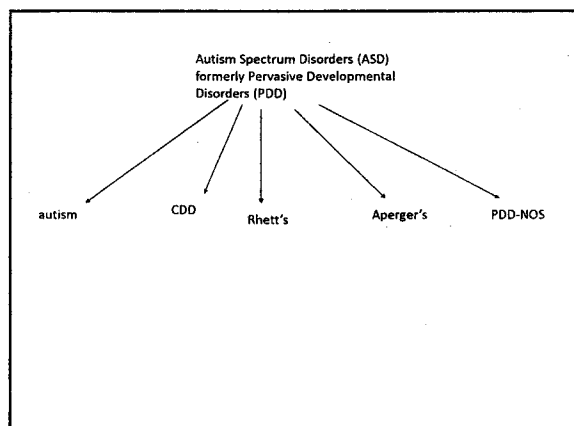
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## Autism

- A behaviorally diagnosed developmental disability characterized by:
  - Deficits in communication skills
  - Deficits in social skills
  - A restricted range of interests or behaviors

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